



**MUHAMMAD SHAHIDULLAH**

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

# Muhammad Shahidullah

SUBHADRA KUMAR SEN



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Calcutta  
21.12.94

Subhadra Kumar Sen



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## Introduction

On 2 February 1786 in his Third Anniversary Discourse Sir William Jones, the founder president of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, made a truly prophetic and a really epoch-making observation on the common origin or genetic affiliation of Sanskrit on the one hand and Greek, Latin and certain other languages of Europe and Asia on the other. Sir William Jones observed :

The Sanskrit language whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps no longer exists. There is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with Sanskrit, and the old Persian might be added to the same family. if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of Persia.

And what was the aftermath of this seminal idea is well-known history. (In fact, Jones was expected to occupy a chair in Linguistics in the U.S. after his retirement from the judicial service in India. Unfortunately, his death forestalled the possibility.)

The significant point is that by a sequence of events or a chain of historical accidents Calcutta became associated with the origin of a new science—the science of language. Call it (Comparative) Philology, Linguistics, Linguistique, Philologie or Sprachwissenschaft.

It was also in the fitness of things that 124 years later Sir

Asutosh Mookerjee, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University and an academician of rare brilliance and perception anticipating the immense possibility of this new discipline—nurtured at that time in Europe—in a multilingual and ancient country like India decided to introduce the subject in the University curriculum. Resultantly, the Department of Comparative Philology (now the Department of Linguistics) was set up. This was the first department of its kind outside Europe, England and America. The dream of Sir Asutosh was soon realized. A constellation of three stars of high magnitude appeared: Muhammad Shahidullah (1885-1969), Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890-1977) and Sukumar Sen (1900-1992). Here it must be recorded that both Shahidullah and Sen were the products of the Department of Comparative Philology, while Chatterji was a product of the Department of English which offered (and even now does offer) a specialized course in Germanic or Teutonic philology—popularly known as Group B course like the ‘A’ course in Oxford. Chatterji took this course which included an in-depth study of Old English, Middle English, Gothic, Old Norse or Old High German and a course in comparative Germanic grammar. Chatterji, however, attended some classes (e.g., Avestan text and grammar) in the Department of Comparative Philology when he was appointed lecturer in the Department of English in the University. Without attaching too much importance one feels tempted to conclude that this fact left indelible marks on the style of Shahidullah and Sen on the one hand and on Chatterji on the other. Judging from the treatment of any given problem Sen and Shahidullah differ significantly from Chatterji. For Shahidullah and Sen the guiding principle is “brevity is the soul of wit” whereas Chatterji believed in the dictum *nālpe sukham asti*. (Batakrishna Ghosh, a contemporary of the triad and a distinguished philologist, was not an alumnus of the Department of Comparative Philology of the Calcutta University. In fact, he was at no stage a student of the Calcutta University.) The subsequent development shows that the creation of the Department of Comparative Philology was totally justified and Sir Asutosh Mookerjee’s stand was fully vindicated.

Muhammad Shahidullah would have been a renowned Sanskritist—as he possibly dreamed to be—or a distinguished Sanskrit scholar who was also a polyglot had not the inscrutable Dame Fortune with her characteristic impishness designed otherwise. But that episode should come much later in the chronicle of events. The fact is that the linguistic studies in India profited at the expense of Sanskritic scholarship.

## Family Background

To say that bigotry and narrow fundamentalist obscurantism are anti-god and run counter to the basic tenets of all religion is not a mere platitude. It is a home truth which bears repetition *ad infinitum*. Fortunately Muhammad Shahidullah was born in a devoutly religious family with a long history and a noble tradition. The forefathers of Shahidullah were in charge of the shrine (i.e., *khadem*) of Sayeed Abbas Ali Makki who according to tradition came from Mecca to India to preach Islam in the early decades of the 14th century. In Bengal Abbas Ali Makki came to be known popularly as Pīr Gorāchānd for his extremely fair complexion. Pīr Gorāchānd was revered both by the Hindus and the Muslims particularly in the districts of Burdwan and the 24 Parganas. Thus Pīr Gorāchānd became a symbol of what is now called in the jargon of the politicians "communal harmony". Due to the convergence of many socio-religio-cultural forces an understanding based on respect and tolerance for each other had been slowly developing between the Hindus and the Muslims from the time of the resurgence of the Vaiṣṇava movement under the leadership of Śrī Kṛṣṇacaitanya. In fact the new documents unearthed by Dr. Tarapada Mukherji of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London reveal that generous grants and concessions were made by Śhah-jāhān (regnal year 1628-1658) and Aurangzeb (regnal year 1658-1707) for the preservation and maintenance of the Vaiṣṇava temples in Mathurā and Vrindāvan. (Unfortunately Mukherji's untimely death denied him of the opportunity of seeing the accumulated material through the press. Now these documents are to be published by Professor Irfan Habib as a collaborative work.) However, this tendency of cultural unification continued unobtrusively. And in rural West Bengal this tendency was so strong that an apparently Hindu name like Gobardhan Mondal was quite common in a Muslim family in the district of Burdwan in the twenties of the present century. In this connection it is worth

recounting that under the sobering influence of Śrī Kṛṣṇacaitanya a unity was forging between the Hindus and the Muslims. "Yavana" Haridās was certainly not an exception. This unity could be achieved as the Vaiṣṇava faith also emphasized on the importance of the *name* of the God and not on any image. The basic tenet of Vaiṣṇavism is *nāmaiva kevalam* ('only name'). Herein lies the greatest similarity and the strongest affinity between the Muslims and the Vaiṣṇavas. The probable etymology of the Arabic word *allah* is *al-llah* 'the Supreme God'. (Some scholars, however, consider *allah* as a monomorphemic construction.) The idea of one and only god is the pivot of the Islamic faith. Similarly, the *Vaiṣṇavas* worshipped 'Hari' or 'Kṛṣṇa'.

Nurtured in a family characterized by religious devotion Shahidullah imbibed the essence of the Islamic faith that rejects and condemns the *kafer*. A *kafer* literally is one who distorts truth and covers goodness. Shahidullah also realized the value of the assertion that man is born innocent but he becomes 'good' or 'bad' by his own actions and proclivities. This indeed is the quintessence of all religion. Shahidullah did certainly and rightly take pride in his own religion; and his own religious heritage. In one of his books speaking of himself he wrote "this humble author is one of that lineage". Here he refers to his *Khadem* heritage. This background and his awareness liberated Shahidullah from any kind of narrow sectarianism which causes intolerance and hostility. Piety is a noble quality. And Shahidullah was a pious man. How deeply was this inherited liberalism ingrained in the mind of Shahidullah is clearly reflected in the choice of his academic pursuit.

The changing socio-economic conditions in the country forced this *Khadem* family of Sayeed Abbas Ali Makki to look forward to other ways of subsistence. Golam Abed joined the Vice-regal secretariat as the *mīr munṣī*—the chief secretary. From that time the family was known as the *mīr* family. Golam Abed was the uncle of Munshi Mafijuddin Ahmed.

Shahidullah, the sixth child of Munshi Mafijuddin Ahmed and Hurunnessa, was born on Friday the 10th of July 1885 at the

village Peyārā under Haroa Police Station, near Basirhat in the district of (now North) 24 Parganas in West Bengal. His early boyhood was uneventful and he grew up in the company of his other three brothers and three sisters. He was initially christened Muhammad Ibrahim. Later his mother renamed him Muhammad Shahidullah.

In 1921 Shahidullah went to Dacca (now Dhaka) as University lecturer in the Department of Sanskrit and Bengali. In course of time and by the twist of history Dacca became his permanent residence. So strong, however, was his emotional attachment to the village where he was born that he named his Dacca residence 'Peyārā House'. To Shahidullah past was as much a part of the present as present was of the past. This awareness is a prerequisite for the making of a good philologist. Philological analysis not only demands knowledge of the dead classical languages but also a good understanding of the modern spoken languages. Many problems of Indo-European linguistic were resolved in this way. A good example is the assumption of the existence of the syllabic nasals in the Proto Indo-European. So Shahidullah repeatedly asserted that one could never change one's mother nor one's country.

## Early Education

Shahidullah, as was the custom in those days, had his initial schooling in the village school (*pāthśālā* — the indigenous counterpart of a kindergarten). A vivid and realistic picture of such a *pāthśālā* was depicted by Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee in his celebrated novel *Pather Pāncālī*. Here Shahidullah was given initiation in Bengali and elementary Mathematics programmed to help one in one's day-to-day activity. The Bengali course was more comprehensive. The text books were the First and the Second Book of Bengali (*Varṇaparicaya*) by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891). Here Shahidullah also read the *Kathāmālā* (1851?) and the *Bodhodaya* (1851) by the same author.

At the age of 10 young Shahidullah left his village and moved to Howrah where his father had settled. His father was a clerk in the office of the Howrah District Board. He was in charge of matters relating to registration of property. Shahidullah was first admitted to the Belileous ME School. However, eventually he passed his Middle English School Examination in 1899 from the Pañcānantalā ME School. Here he offered Sanskrit as the third or "classical" language.

At a very early age Shahidullah developed an interest in languages. While still in school he started to learn Persian, Urdu, Hindi and Oriya on his own. (In this he closely resembles Michael Ventris [1922-1956] who deciphered Linear B scripts since known as Mycenaean Greek.) Howrah was and still is an industrial town and consequently multilingual. Perhaps this early exposure to such a multilingual situation awakened Shahidullah's interest in language as a phenomenon. (Suniti Kumar Chatterji's interest in language was through the different design-features of various scripts. Art, particularly any form of visual art, was Chatterji's first love till the end of his life.) Shahidullah was not keen on activities which involved physical exertion. So while other



boys played ball games or other games or flew kites he used to relax by studying the languages mentioned above. In fact Shahidullah was a precocious boy. He never liked "light" reading. He admitted that he never liked reading "popular" novels and stories in either English or Bengali which were read voraciously by his classmates. He read only "serious" books and classics. In this he to some extent anticipated T.S. Eliot. Like the famous twentieth century poet-critic Shahidullah believed that one's reading of books should follow an order. The order should be from good to better.

Here one of his early achievements should be recorded. While a school student Shahidullah devised a system of transliterating Urdu, Arabic and Persian in the Bengali script. Transliteration from one script to another is not an easy task. The nature of the difficulty becomes obvious if one is asked to transliterate the 's' in English *has* in Bengali orthography.

Scanning through Shahidullah's school life one can point three significant episodes which played most crucial part in moulding his academic career and his personality. These three episodes need recounting.

Shahidullah, as has been stated earlier, came from a religious family. From his very boyhood days Shahidullah did his daily *namaz* regularly. But it was more as a matter of convention than as a matter of conviction. In his school days he claimed in an autobiographical writing to have read Girish Chandra Sen's Bengali translation of *Quran Sharif* and *Tāpasmālā* and Krishna Kumar Mitra's *Muhammad Carita* (Life of Muhammad). Here Shahidullah has inadvertently given us a key to the understanding of his character. Girish Chandra Sen (1835-1910), was a good scholar of Arabic and Persian and had written the book *Mohammader Jībanī* (Life of Muhammad). *Tāpasmālā* (Lives of Mohammedan Saints) is a far more interesting book. It was an anonymous publication compiled from the Persian work *Tejkratulouliā*.<sup>1</sup> The book appeared in three parts (1880, '81,

1. The correct spelling should be *Tazkirātulauliā*.

'82) and was printed in Calcutta (Indian Mirror Press and Bidhan Press, 6 College Square); its publishers being Purna Chandra De and Ram Sarvasva Bhattacharji respectively. By reading these books again and again Shahidullah came to realize the real significance of the Islamic faith. He became a truly devoted Muslim—not by convention but from conviction and deep understanding and realization.

The second episode was perhaps less fundamental but equally significant for a teenager. The students of class VIII were asked to write in English an essay on the coconut tree.

The quality of one essay was so far above the average that the examiner refused to accept it as a composition of a boy of class VIII. Shahidullah had to convince the teacher-examiner by a practical demonstration and eventually received a prize for the essay. This distinction, albeit minor, opened to the young boy new horizons. The ever expanding world of knowledge and delights lying in it, not to speak of the recognition, were thrown open to him.

The third episode was no less fundamental than the first and equally significant. Shahidullah offered Sanskrit as his third i.e., classical language. It is said that the awe-inspiring reputation of the Arabic teacher as a hard taskmaster who believed in the theory of not sparing the rod prompted Shahidullah to take up Sanskrit as his classical language which certainly was against the run of the common practice. The common practice was that the Hindu students offered Sanskrit as their "classical" language and the Muslim students Arabic. This indeed was a happy accident.

Shahidullah learnt Sanskrit so well that throughout his school life he never stood second in the subject. Although serious and studious young Shahidullah was not a recluse by nature. He was quite popular among his classmates who were mostly Hindus. The Hindu students playfully teased the Sanskrit teacher for awarding highest mark in Sanskrit to Shahidullah, who was a Muslim. The Paṇḍit-maśai (< *mahāśaya*) always replied that Sirajuddaulah (he affectionately called Shahidullah 'Sirajuddaulah') knew Sanskrit much better than any other student. Naturally he got the highest

mark. This assertion gave Shahidullah the right encouragement and consequent confidence needed for the flourishing of a young talent.

In 1904 Shahidullah passed the University Entrance Examination from the Howrah District School. He was admitted to the Presidency College, Calcutta. In 1906 he passed the First Arts Examination with Sanskrit as one of his subjects. Subsequently he joined the Hooghly College as a B.A. student with double Honours in Sanskrit and English. (Offering double Honours was the common practice in those days. Sir Jadunath Sarkar had double Honours in English and History.) However, later, at the advice of Harinath De, the then Principal of the Hooghly College, the great polymath, Shahidullah gave up English and concentrated only on Sanskrit. One of the reasons for Shahidullah's joining the Hooghly College was that Harinath De was the principal there. Unfortunately throughout his two-year stay there Shahidullah was afflicted by Malaria—the bane of Bengal at that time. The obnoxious disease so persistently dogged him that he could not qualify in the B.A. final examination (1908). Deciding that a change of place might restore his failing health Shahidullah went to Jessore accepting the position of an Assistant Teacher in the Jessore District School. In 1909 Shahidullah appeared at the B.A. Examination as a private candidate from Jessore. This time even though he secured pass mark in all the subjects he unfortunately fell short of the aggregate required to be declared pass by only one mark. Shahidullah returned to Calcutta. He was admitted to the City College. From this college, in 1910, he graduated B.A. with Honours in Sanskrit. He was placed in the Second Class securing highest mark in the Vedic paper. Incidentally Shahidullah was the first Muslim student to have graduated B.A. with Honours in Sanskrit.

1910 is a significant year in Shahidullah's life. The significance is discussed in the following chapter. If we consider Shahidullah's academic achievement till 1910 it appears to be a sad story of belied expectations. His academic record upto this stage is unromantic, inconspicuous and chequered. It is really and truly mediocre. But underneath this vapid aridity preparations were

going on for greater achievements. On the surface structure to use a current linguistic terminology, this apparent mediocrity—examination and resultwise—was due to two different deep structure constraints. One obviously was the poor state of his health. The other was his habit of extensive reading, not necessarily, related to what is now called “course work” and his *penchant for learning languages*. Consequently his examination preparations suffered.

## University Education in India and Abroad

As was expected Shahidullah enrolled himself in the Post-Graduate Department of Sanskrit in the university (of Calcutta). At this juncture Shahidullah had to face an unexpected crisis—a crisis which could have completely crushed his hopes and ambitions. Eventually this deep crisis diffused and ultimately this unfortunate event gave a new direction, a new significance and a sense of purpose to his career. This unexpected development offered a new challenge and threw open new horizons to be conquered. The negative result of this so-called “unfortunate” episode (—in retrospect one wonders whether it really was unfortunate—) was that Shahidullah had to discontinue his studies in the Sanskrit Department. This event is fully discussed in the next chapter. Shahidullah was advised by the University authority to join the newly-created Department of Comparative Philology. In 1912 Shahidullah graduated M.A. in Comparative Philology having the distinction to be the *first* student of the Department.

Immediately before the First World War the employment prospects for educated young men were not at all bright. Particularly a degree in an obscure subject like Comparative Philology offered very little or no scope. As a result most of the Post-Graduate students joined the University Law College for the B.L. degree which was supposed to be the second line of defence. Following the general trend of the young graduates of his time Shahidullah also joined the Law classes. In January 1914 he passed the B.L. Examination.

As Shahidullah could not fulfil his hope of reading Sanskrit at the Post-Graduate level Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, the then Vice-Chancellor, had promised to help him to study Sanskrit in a foreign University. Indeed it was not a mere formal promise of consolation. Sir Asutosh Mookerjee considered it his moral obligation to help each and every promising enthusiastic and

sincere student in his pursuit of knowledge. In 1913 the Government of India offered a scholarship for the scientific study of Sanskrit in Europe. (In 1921 Suniti Kumar Chatterji was awarded this scholarship.) With the help of Sir Asutosh Shahidullah won the scholarship and was formally admitted to the University of Freiburg. Most unfortunately he was disqualified in the medical test. The Principal of the Calcutta Medical College refused to give him a certificate of physical fitness to the effect that he would be able to survive the hostile European climate. It is alleged that the grounds for refusal was not strictly 'medical', although it is true that as an aftereffect of Malaria which he had suffered from as student in the Hooghly College Shahidullah did never enjoy a robust health.

However, 13 years after in the year 1926 (the year in which Chatterji's *magnum opus* *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* was published by the University of Calcutta) Shahidullah was granted a sabbatical by the Dacca University authority to study in Europe. Shahidullah went to Paris. He enrolled himself in the University of Sorbonne. Here he attended courses in Vedic, Old Persian, Tibetan and in Comparative Philology. Simultaneously he joined *Archive de la Parole* for special training in Phonetics. Eventually, he settled down to work on his thesis. His thesis was the first full-length comprehensive linguistic study of the *dohās* of Kāṇha and Saraha—two Buddhist *siddhācāryas* who composed both in Avahatṭha and in Old Bengali. The *Dohās* of Saraha and Kāṇha were discovered by MM Hara Prasād Śāstrī in the Nepal Raj Darbar Library. The MS contained four books—the Caryā songs, the *dohās* of Kāṇha, the *dohās* of Saraha and the *Ḍākārnava*. The first book is written in Proto- and Old Bengali, the second and the third books are written in Avahatṭha—the last stage of Apabhraṃśa and the language of the fourth book is a mixed language, difficult to ascribe to any particular stage of Indo-Aryan. The language of the text of *Ḍākārnava* has not yet been analysed exhaustively.

Shahidullah spared himself no pains to attain perfection. In a letter dated 6th January 1927 he gave a brief outline of his academic activities. He wrote that for the preparation for his thesis he

had to study modern languages like Maithili, Panjabi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Marathi, Lahnda, Kashmiri, Nepali, Sinhalese and old languages like Avesta and the Prakrits.

In 1928 Shahidullah submitted his *Les chants mystiques de Kanha et de Saraha*. The thesis was accepted by the University of Sorbonne and the degree of D.Litt. was conferred on him. He also submitted a research paper in Phonetics on the sound system of Bengali. On the strength of it he received a diploma in Phonetics from the University of Paris. Shahidullah had the rare fortune to prepare his thesis under the guidance of Jules Bloch—the greatest scholar of Indo-Aryan linguistics of the time. The training—Shahidullah had from Bloch stood him in good stead in his later days. After successfully completing his *gurukulāvāsa* in Paris, Shahidullah moved to Freiburg to study Vedic Sanskrit and the Prākṛits. But the time was fast running out. His sabbatical being over he had to return to his University town.

## Early Influences

We are told that the scientists do not know what happened exactly in the infinitesimal fraction of the first second immediately after the Big Bang. Thereafter what has happened—a chain of interactions, one event logically leading to another and so on—can be logically reconstructed. This means that in a sequence every event is connected with the event immediately preceding and succeeding it. If this is true on the macro-level it is necessarily equally true on the micro-level. A man is not an unconnected individual. He is a part of a sequence. And as a part he is conditioned by and in his turn he also conditions what comes before and after. In the case of an individual conditioning factors are variable and are not always easy to detect and point out. Shahidullah was a product of his time and society. In the following paragraphs an attempt is made to unravel the tangled skeins of these conditioning factors. These factors are mostly the results of interaction with other persons and personalities who made Shahidullah what he ultimately became. Here not only the character of the man concerned but also his time and social environment became his destiny. The social environment in its turn is made up of two complementary components : one is internal, i.e., the family influence and the other is external, i.e., the influences which come from outside of the family. What Shahidullah imbibed from his family has been discussed in the second chapter. In this chapter the 'external' forces that shaped Shahidullah's character, personality and academic interests are discussed.

### School Teachers

The first and perhaps the most significant influence of the external nature had both a positive and a negative effect on Shahidullah. The positive influence was exerted by the soothing influence of the Sanskrit teacher (*Paṇḍit-maśāī*). He introduced Shahidullah to the



charm and beauty of Sanskrit literature and language. But in the ordinary course this was not expected. A Muslim student was expected to offer 'Arabic' and not 'Sanskrit' as his 'Classical' language. The sheer physical terror evoked by the Arabic teacher tilted the balance and settled the issue. Shahidullah confided that to escape sheer physical punishment he took up Sanskrit.

#### Harinath De (1877-1911)

Shahidullah came in contact with the legendary figure of Harinath De when he joined the Hooghly College as an undergraduate student. De was then the principal of the College. It was on the advice of De that Shahidullah did not pursue his earlier plan of studying Honours in English and Sanskrit. (At that time Calcutta University allowed the students to offer optionally double Honours, i.e., Honours in two subjects. Professor Rabindra Narayan Ghosh had Honours in English and Philosophy. Subsequently the University changed this system and introduced the single Honours course. Dr R.K. Dasgupta informs me that still earlier the University had introduced a triple Honours course.) Being advised by De Shahidullah pursued a single Honours course in Sanskrit. De, noting his student's interest and acumen in learning languages and linguistics, encouraged and helped him to learn as many modern and classical languages as possible. Thus De played a significant role in giving a positive direction to the character and personality of the young undergraduate.

#### Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924)

A good Vice-Chancellor should not only be a good administrator but also a man of healthy academic interest—if not himself an academician of high standing. Sir Asutosh had all these qualities. Consequently under his able stewardship Calcutta University attained great academic heights which has not yet been surpassed by any other Indian University. These two rare qualities of Sir Asutosh came to Shahidullah's rescue at two critical junctures of his life. These two events need special mention.

In 1909 Shahidullah failed to qualify in the B.A. Examination

as he was one mark short of the required aggregate although he had secured pass mark in all the subjects. It was Sir Asutosh who advised Shahidullah to enroll himself as a regular candidate and appear at the B.A. Examination next year. Shahidullah agreed. But getting admission in Sanskrit Honours became a problem. Sanskrit was taught by Brahmin pundits in most colleges. They were conservative and so refused to accept a Muslim student in the class. Here Sir Asutosh intervened. He talked to the Principal of the City College which was run by the Brahmas. As the Brahmas were liberal and progressive the Principal of the City College did not hesitate to accept Shahidullah as a regular student. One *impasse* was resolved.

The second incident was much more serious. It could have led to disastrous consequences but for Sir Asutosh Mookerjee's rare academic insight. In 1910 Shahidullah was admitted to the Post-Graduate Department of Sanskrit. Then the most unsavoury and shameful incident took place. The teacher who was teaching the Vedas refused to accept a Muslim student. The teacher was adamant. No amount of pressure or persuasion could make him see reason and recant. It is alleged that the great Vedic scholar Satyabrata Samasrami was the teacher concerned. However, I could not get any corroborative evidence. It was almost an open and shut case both for the student as well as for the University authority. The affair was taking an ugly turn. The career of a student was at stake. Having failed to arrive at any amicable solution Sir Asutosh urged Shahidullah to change his course of study. He advised him to join the newly created Department of Comparative Philology. Sir Asutosh assured Shahidullah that in this Department he would be able to read the Rig Veda and that too from the Western point of view. Additionally he would know more about other classical languages like Greek and Latin. This new discipline caught the imagination of the young student and he agreed to join this Department. Thus Shahidullah had the proud privilege of becoming the first product of the Department of Comparative Philology. This change of subject had the approval of Harinath De. The more significant point here is Shahidullah's attitude—his involvement. Like a true scholar he accepted the

situation without sacrificing his academic object : to read the Vedas. A person of lesser intellectual integrity would have politicized the issue. It is true that some efforts were made to turn the issue into a major communal controversy. But Shahidullah refused to be a party to such an ignoble effort.

### The Tagores

In 1909 (Bengali year 1316) *Bhārati*, the most prestigious literary journal of the time published an article entitled *Madanabhasma* (Burning of Madana), written by an unknown author. It was the author's maiden article. Swarnakumari Devi (1855-1932), daughter of Devendranath Tagore and the elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), was the editor of the journal. The editor was so impressed by the quality of the article that she deemed it fit to prefix a note to the effect that the article written by a young Muslim shows exceptional knowledge and sensitive understanding of Sanskrit literature. She wrote : "It is heartening to note that despite our religious differences we have been able to accept the fact that we are Bengalees and by the will of God it has been our lot either to thrive or to perish in the same country. It is also a matter of great happiness that our Muslim brothers are accepting Bengali literature as their national literature." The writer of this article, needless to say, was Muhammad Shahidullah. Publication of this article gave Shahidullah the filip to write more on literary themes.

Later Shahidullah came in contact with Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore had known Shahidullah from his first article in the *Bhārati* and was impressed by his latitude of vision and depth of his scholarship. He had watched with interest the career of this extraordinary young man. In fact Tagore always took pains to be acquainted with his talented younger contemporaries. He paid several visits to Santiniketan sometimes alone and sometimes with the students. On the evidence of Prabhat Kumar Mukherji, the biographer of the poet, Shahidullah first visited Santiniketan in the autumn of 1921. He met the poet there. Kāji Nazrul Islām then a young poet was at that time at Santiniketan. The more significant

meeting between the young philologist and the poet was in 1936. At the direct instance of the poet Shahidullah wrote on the problems of Bengali spelling. The poet was impressed by his scholarship and personality. As a token of his love and admiration, Tagore presented Shahidullah some of his books and pictures bearing his autograph. Shahidullah in his turn was a great admirer of the poet. He considered him to be the greatest linguist of Bengal who formulated many phonological rules governing the Bengali language. In his *Grammar of the Bengali Language* Shahidullah admitted that he was encouraged in this venture by reading the writings of Tagore. Tagore had a healthy and active interest in Comparative Philology. He had read Karl Brugmann's (1849-1919) *Grundriss* in translation and R. Pischel's (1856-1909) *Prakrit Grammar* in original. Tagore's philological writings are collected in two volumes, viz., *Śabdatattva* (1909) and *Bāṅglā-Bhāṣā Paricay* (1932). Shahidullah wrote a number of articles on Tagore's language and works. Above all *Geetanjali* was his most favourite book—a book which he would read time and again for emotional sustenance. Tagore tried to associate Shahidullah with the academic life of Visva-Bharati.

#### Hara Prasād Śāstrī (1853-1931)

A scholar is made and not born. Scholarship is neither inherited nor is it inborn. It has to be acquired slowly steadily and unceasingly. This is a continuous process. A scholar is not a mere 'bookish theoretic'. Scholarship has to be cultivated. It is also an attitude which has to be developed. This attitude is basically the development of a negative capability of gradually relieving and freeing oneself from one's personal prejudices. This is not an easy accomplishment.

Indological studies in India, particularly in Bengal, was at that time dominated by Hara Prasād Śāstrī—a person who embodied all the qualities of a true scholar and Śāstrī had received his training from Sir Rajendralal Mitra (1822-1891), the most outstanding Indologist of the time. Śāstrī was an orthodox Brahmin and a Sanskritist but without the faintest tinge of conservative obscu-

rantism. Śāstrī combined in his scholarship the very best of the two traditions—oriental and occidental. It was a happy coincidence that Shahidullah came in contact with Hara Prasād Śāstrī in his formative years. In 1920 Shahidullah read an article entitled *Bāṅglā Sahitya O Chātrasamāj* ('Bengali Literature and the Student Community') in a meeting organised by the Bangīya Sāhitya Pariṣat. The meeting was chaired by Hara Prasād Śāstrī. Subsequently Shahidullah came in close contact with Hara Prasād Śāstrī when he was appointed lecturer in the Department of Bengali and Sanskrit in the newly founded Dacca University. Śāstrī was the Chairman of the Department. Shahidullah from his intimate interaction with Śāstrī came to realize the most important qualities of a true scholar : the unbiassed objective attitude—the ability to analyse any problem dispassionately and precisely. He also developed a keen sense of humour from Śāstrī's writing. Like Śāstrī Shahidullah could write on any topic with dignity and with a touch of twinkling humour.

#### Dinesh Chandra Sen (1866-1939)

Dinesh Chandra Sen was a devoted scholar of Old and particularly of Middle Bengali literature. Shahidullah was inspired by Sen's unflinching dedication. Following the footsteps of Sen he was also gradually attracted to folk literature, folk poetry and ballad. The content of folk literature is totally indigenous carrying with it the taste and smell of the soil. This new interest in folk literature brought into focus another aspect of Shahidullah's character—his love for the country and the people. Many actions of his later life which otherwise appear incongruous with his personality seem quite logical when one comes to think of this aspect of his intellectual life.

## In the eyes of His Two Close Associates

### Suniti Kumar Chatterji

Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890-1977) was born in 1890. He was junior to Shahidullah by five years. Chatterji returned to India after his two year stay in London and Paris (1921-'23) and joined the University of Calcutta as Khaira Professor of Indian Linguistics and Phonetics. His magnum opus *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* was published in 1926. The same year Shahidullah sailed for Paris. Chatterji worked on a large canvas. His book is not only an account of the development of Bengali language, it is also an introduction to New Indo-Aryan. Whereas Shahidullah worked on a limited area. The choice of the respective topics show clearly the difference in attitude between the two scholars. Chatterji's was a broad sweep—the entire history of the Bengali language, Shahidullah's was a minutely detailed study of the language of the Buddhist mystic songs. Its scope is limited but the analysis is penetrating. It is not only a grammatical study of the *Dohās*—it is equally an edition of the *Dohās* with very plausible alternative readings. If one is permitted to draw an analogy from literature Chatterji's book is *War and Peace* whereas Shahidullah's is *Pride and Prejudice*.

Chatterji became acquainted with Shahidullah in 1911. Since Comparative Philology, to quote Chatterji, "was not a bread and butter subject" few students were attracted to it. Finding a kindred spirit in Shahidullah Chatterji was naturally drawn to him and was impressed by his scholarship. Chatterji was a man of varied interest. He was as keenly interested in Homeric Verses as in Sufism or in the formation of past tense in Bengali. Chatterji readily acknowledged whatever he had learnt from Shahidullah. In a letter Chatterji wrote : "I consider it to be a great fortune that I know you."

### Sukumar Sen

Sukumar Sen (1900-1992), successor of Chatterji as Khaira Professor of Indian Linguistics and Phonetics, was born in 1900. Junior by 15 years Sen enjoyed the love and affection of Shahidullah. As Sen's mother's family originally hailed from a village which was close to Peyārā (Shahidullah's village), Shahidullah considered him as his nephew. However, Sen first met Shahidullah at Suniti Kumar Chatterji's residence on Sukia's Row in north Calcutta. In his auto-biography written in Bengali Sen has given a delightful account of his first meeting with Shahidullah. Sen had a few similarities with Shahidullah.

They both had long established rural connections, both had graduated Honours in Sanskrit, with the difference that Shahidullah took M.A. in Comparative Philology as a victim of circumstances, whereas Sen did it at his free will. Sen shared Shahidullah's interest in rural life. They had intimate knowledge of Old and Middle Bengali literature. According to Sen, Shahidullah's analyses of morphology of Middle Bengali was amazing in brilliance. In fact Shahidullah's acquaintance with the Middle Bengali texts was very intimate.

## In Search of a Career

In 1908 after failing to get through the B.A. Examination Shahidullah joined the Jessore District School as an assistant teacher. He held this position for one year. After completing his M.A. and Law courses Shahidullah was appointed Head Master of Sītākunda High School in Chittagong. In 1915 he gave up that position and returned to his native place. Since he could not get any job at that time he started legal practice in the Basirhat Court. Shahidullah was never happy in the stifling uncongenial atmosphere of the Judges's Court. It was not his place. He was a complete misfit there—a fish out of water. He was aching to pursue his studies more vigorously, to undertake serious research projects. He was torn within. When he was almost at the breaking point he had an accidental meeting with Sir Asutosh. It is reported that Sir Asutosh told Shahidullah : "Court is not your place Shahidullah. Join the University". A drunken sailor in a Shakespearean play aptly observes that 'One who is born to be hanged will never be drowned'. Fully realizing the sad predicament of this young scholar Sir Asutosh offered him Sarat Kumar Lahiri Research Assistantship at Rs. 200/- per month. He was attached to Dinesh Candra Sen, who was then the head of the Department of Bengali in the University. He joined the Department of Bengali on the 1st of June 1919. This was just the break Shahidullah was looking for. Thereafter he never looked back.



## As a University Teacher

Shahidullah was appointed a lecturer in the Department of Bengali and Sanskrit in the University of Dacca. Officially he assumed responsibility from the July 1, 1921 but unofficially at the request of Mahāmahopādhyāya Hara Prasād Śāstrī he had assumed his duties in the Department on the 2nd of June. From 1921 to 1954 Shahidullah was associated with the Department in one capacity or another barring the period of sabbatical (1926-1928) which he spent for higher studies mostly in France and marginally in Germany. In 1967 Shahidullah was accorded the honour of an Emeritus Professor—a distinction which he richly deserved.

Śāstrī entrusted Shahidullah with the drafting of the syllabus for the M.A. Course in Bengali. This gave Shahidullah the opportunity to show the range and depth of his scholarship. Shahidullah understood that if Bengali studies had to mature as an academic discipline in the European sense of the term proper and adequate weightage should be given to both the linguistic and the literary aspects. Thus the study of Bengali literature must begin from the oldest period of the Bengali language, i.e., the *Caryā* songs (circa 1000 A.D.). The language of these songs structurally differs significantly from that of modern Bengali. Hence philological study should form as important a component as literary criticism or aesthetics. The clarity of the academic vision as reflected in the drafted syllabus was appreciated by Śāstrī and it was adopted without any significant change. As a matter of fact the syllabus continued unchanged for many many years.

Initially Dacca University had a single Department for Bengali and Sanskrit. In 1937 the Department was bifurcated. A separate Sanskrit Department was established. Dr. Sushil Kumar De was assigned the responsibility of the newly created Sanskrit Department. Shahidullah was asked to chair the Bengali Department.

In 1944 Shahidullah retired. But again in 1948 he was ap-

pointed a Professor in the Bengali Department and served the Department till 1954. At the time of his final retirement Shahidullah was Professor and Head of the Department of Bengali. But his connection with the University did not cease. Till 1956 he was a Part-time Lecturer in French in the Department of International Relations. Earlier he was for sometime a Part-time Lecturer in the Law Faculty of the University (1922-1924).

In 1954 the Rajsahi University was founded. In 1955 Shahidullah was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Bengali and was requested to organise the Department. He discharged his responsibility to the satisfaction of all concerned and held the position till 1958.

Shahidullah's career as a university teacher spreads over nearly four decades. He has produced many brilliant and many more not-so-brilliant students. But he had succeeded in one thing (and that I believe to be his unique achievement as a teacher of Bengali language and literature). He infused in his students and through his students to others a deep love for the Bengali language, life and culture. And this was clearly evident in the events of 21st February of that eventful year. His students as he rightly observed to Sukumar Sen in a private conversation had literally and freely shed their blood for the sake of their mother-tongue. Shahidullah for his scholarship became a cult figure in the academic world of Bangladesh and India. But he was held in equal esteem by the common people also. This was perhaps his most singular achievement.

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## Activities

### Non-Academic

Shahidullah was equally keenly interested in public activities as in academic activities. From 1915 to 1919 he was elected Vice-Chairman of the Basirhat Municipality. Earlier in 1912 he was appointed the superintendent of the Muslim orphanage. He held this position through 1913. Shahidullah's life of public activity can be divided into two phases. From 1912 to 1919 was the period of public activities mainly non-academic. From 1919 his activity was mainly academic although he had to discharge some non-academic functions entailed on him as a part of his academic responsibility.

He was, however, catapulted into the whirligig of political activity especially—towards the end of his active career. This event ultimately marked the beginning of a process which culminated in the de-capitation of a sovereign state and the emergence of another.

In 1948 Shahidullah clearly indicated why Urdu was unacceptable as the national language of Pakistan. His clear and precise understanding of the issue based on his knowledge of Linguistics sowed a seed which eventually bore fruit in the recognition of Bengali as the national language of an independent sovereign state. But neither this was easy nor was the process smooth. He had to incur the displeasure of the arrogant and uncompromising state power. As a result he was not allowed to accept a richly deserved international recognition for his academic attainment. Most unfortunate was that he was wrongly vilified by the fundamentalists. His love for Bengali was misconstrued. He was branded a non-Muslim for his love of Sanskrit. Shahidullah perhaps was more 'Muslim' than his fundamentalist critics. He grasped the contemporary reality and anticipated future. Religion certainly is an important force in our private life but we have to

reckon with other forces in our public life. He wrote that it was a fact that East Pakistan (subsequently Bangladesh) was the land of both the Muslims and the non-Muslims. But it was more significant that the land belonged to the Bengalees. In fact Shahidullah was actually echoing the sentiments expressed by Rabindranath Tagore in a song written on the occasion of 'unsettling' the 'settled fact' of the Partition of Bengal in 1905.

Shahidullah took pride in the fact that his students placed the Bengali language in the highest pedestal literally at the cost of their lives. He would understandably become sentimental when he had to speak on what had happened on that fateful 21st February.

Shahidullah hated politics for the sake of it. He knew that politics was a dirty game. But he was bold and courageous enough to fight for any right cause even at the risk of being misunderstood. If such an attitude is considered political, Shahidullah then was a political man. The issue that became crucial was by no means 'political'. This was a very real identity crisis—a question of survival not only of a people but also of a cultural milieu. And here he was uncompromising. He allowed his youngest son Murtaza Basir to participate in the movement launched on the 21st of February 1952.

### Academic

Shahidullah did not belong to that type of scholar who thrived in an exclusively cloistered life of privacy. He was an able organiser and an untiring worker who could set himself as an example to be followed by his colleagues, friends and students. He was associated with many academic organisations. In his younger days he was an active member of the Bangīya Sāhitya Pariṣat, the most prestigious academy in the country at that time. In fact many of his early as well as significant articles were read in the monthly meetings of the Pariṣat and were subsequently published in the journal of the Pariṣat. He was also the founder-secretary (1911) of the Bangiya Musalmān Sāhitya Samiti (Bengali Muslim Literary Association). The founder-president of the association was Maulavi Ekinuddin Ahmed. In 1915 Shahidullah was replaced by

Maulavi Abdul Karim and again in 1917 Shahidullah was appointed secretary (vide *Bangīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* BS 1325 p. 72-73). He was closely associated with many other literary and educational societies of which the most noteworthy are the Bengali Academy (Dacca), the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, the Urdu Academy and the Islamic Encyclopaedia project. More details about his academic activities will be found in the next chapter.

## Shahidullah—The Man

Immediately after the armistice of the Second World War the eminent English novelist J.B. Priestley was asked by a BBC correspondent whether the novelist noticed any significant change in the human behaviour pattern in the post-war Great Britain. Priestley, it is reported, said that he did not notice any change. 'Men still fall in love and women out of it.' One wonders had the novelist been alive today in the last decade of the 20th century and had he been asked the same question what would have been his reaction. We are told that we are heading towards the 21st century. Indeed we are. The great technological advances almost revolutionary in nature give a curious turn to the last decade of the century. Machine is interfering with human relations. Hand written personal letters are being replaced by telefax and e-mail. This is a period of rapid change. In this fast changing socio-economic-politico-scientific context human relations are also changing. The rationale of the old values are seriously questioned and in some cases summarily rejected. Shahidullah belonged to a different world and a different time. It is perhaps futile today to seek among us a man like Shahidullah.

Born in a middle class Bengali family Shahidullah imbibed all the characteristic features of the middle class Bengali society. This society, mostly landed gentry, was firmly rooted to the inherited tradition. Adventurism of any sort was against its nature. Conventionality, if not conservatism, has sustained the fabric of the middle class society. This is by and large true of the middle class all over the world. Shahidullah was the product of this milieu.

Shahidullah, like his contemporaries, well combined in his personality liberalism which was inducted through English education with the inherited values, particularly religious. The destabilising influence of the followers of Henry L. Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) was by then a matter of history. Sufism was Shahidullah's family

inheritance. The basic tenets of sufism are the oneness of god and that there is no absolute reality but god. (Sufism, incidentally, had great influence on the Bengali life in general.) Shahidullah was deeply religious but free from any prejudice. He participated in all religious meetings and congregations. He attended meetings of the Ramkrishna Mission. He was also interested in Buddhism. This interest may be due to his studies in the language of the Aśokan edicts in particular and the Middle Indic in general. Nevertheless, it gave a new dimension to the character of the man.

Another feature of Shahidullah's middle class upbringing is noticed in his choice of his profession. Linguistics, then, was a little-known subject outside the University circle. Naturally, it then—perhaps as it is even today—was not at all an economically viable discipline. It offered very little scope for employment. Additionally the financial state of the Calcutta University was then very unstable. It had to depend entirely on the grants released by the Government which varied from year to year. Under the circumstances a young man who stepped out of the University with an M.A. diploma in Comparative Philology, had a very uncertain future before him. Had Shahidullah been troubled by the considerations of mere creature comfort he would have joined the Bar. True he did have a short stint in the Basirhat Court. But as soon as the opportunity came he hung up his 'gown'.

Shahidullah was an academician. Academic activities like some plants best thrive in seclusion. Shahidullah had enjoyed a secluded life of a University teacher. Unlike their modern counterparts the University teachers in those days did not enjoy media exposure. Without either being romantic or sentimental one can say that those were the days of plain living and high thinking. Shahidullah loved a contented life of a University teacher and a researcher. However, he was also aware of the fact that as a social being he had other duties to discharge. So whenever situation demanded he came out of his cloistered life and joined hands with the populace. Thus on many occasions he came out in the open to take issues with the Government of which reference has already been made in the earlier chapter.

Shahidullah's character, his convictions, his attitude to contem-

porary socio-political problems and his views on the fundamental quest of human life are clearly reflected in his public oration. In his speeches he always emphasized on the fact that the residents of Bengal are first Bengalees and then either Hindus or Muslims or Christians. He thought that the process of acculturation could only be achieved through mutual understanding and respect for each other. He succinctly stated that cultural difference between the Hindus and the Muslims in one short sentence. In a public lecture in Dacca he said that the backbone of Hindu culture is diversity whereas the backbone of Muslim culture is unity.

By nature Shahidullah was gentle, kind, easy of access, eager to help those who needed it and above all unambitious from the materialistic point of view. Like Thomas Hardy's stoical hero he may have realized that happiness lay in the limitations of aspiration. All these qualities rendered Shahidullah popular to all who knew him.

Shahidullah was a complete man in the sense that like the bird of Wordsworth's poem he was "True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!"



## Contribution

It is not an easy task to make a summary assessment of an active career which spreads over seven decades of intense activity. The difficulty assumes greater proportion if the person concerned extends the range of his activities in many directions. Shahidullah is a good instance. He took active interest in many fields. In fact Shahidullah's time was the time of 'enlightenment' and not narrow water-tight compartmentalized super-specialization. Thus a linguist could write on palaeography, on the role of women in the society, on the importance of folk literature, also critical essay on Bengali literature. Scholarship was truly encyclopaedic. Alas! those days have become history. Now we live in the days of specialization. Under the circumstances the best that can be done is to attempt a general survey which amounts to mechanical tabulation.

Shahidullah, as has been hinted above, wrote on a wide variety of subjects. His writings on various subjects can be grouped under the following heads :

- I Linguistic
- II Literary which again can be subgrouped as :
  - a. Critical writings and literary history
  - b. Creative writing
- III Philosophical
- IV Miscellaneous writings covering social problems, education, etc.

Shahidullah is primarily a linguist—a linguist of the first generation of the Calcutta school who eventually came to dominate the Indian scene till the sixth decade of the present century. Naturally the first question that comes to mind is what is his contribution to Linguistics. Before attempting to answer this question one sad state of fact has to be acknowledged. Regrettably most of Shahidullah's fundamental writings are either out of print or has

never been printed. Moreover, Shahidullah started to write more in Bengali. Most of his seminal writings on Old and Middle Bengali appeared on the pages of the journal of the Bangīya Sāhitya Pariṣat. Hence these articles failed to draw the much-deserved attention of the scholars outside Bengal. It does not mean that he did not write in English. Most of his articles dealing with Middle Indic or Old Indic and Iranian appeared in Indian Historical Quarterly or were presented in the All India Oriental Conference and appeared in the Proceedings of AIOC. In fact his article on Bengali phonetics and phonology which was written in French and which obtained him a diploma in Phonetics was never printed. One sincerely hopes that the manuscript survives in some unexpected corner and will turn up some day. Shahidullah's doctoral dissertation '*Les chants mystiques de Kanha et de Saraha*' originally published by Adrien Maisonneuve has long been out of print.

In 1920 Shahidullah's paper on 'Outlines of the Historical Grammar of the Bengali Language' was published in the journal of the Department of Letters. This paper was written as a part of his assignment as the Sarat Kumar Lahiri Research Assistant in Bengali Philology attached to the Department of Bengali, Calcutta University. This is a compact introductory essay on the principles and application of Historical-Comparative Grammar with special reference to the history and development of the Bengali personal pronoun.

The topic chosen by Shahidullah was at that time an untrodden field. To familiarize the readers he sets out to define the scope of 'Historical Grammar' and 'Comparative Grammar', their interrelations and interdependence. To illustrate the points he did not cite examples of classical languages like Sanskrit, Greek, Latin—in fact that would have made his task easier but would have defeated the purpose of the paper. On the contrary to drive the point home he cited the different forms of the Bengali personal pronouns and unhesitatingly juxtaposed 'standard forms' and 'dialectal forms'. Since this is his maiden article in the field and since it is difficult to get hold of this article I have reprinted the article in the appendix.

In 1928 Shahidullah's most significant work *Les Chants*

*mystiques de Kanha et de Saraha* was published. The book was introduced to the scholarly world by Jules Bloch—the doyen of Indian Linguisticians. The thesis is a thorough analytical study of the language of the *Dohās*, mostly rhymed couplets mystic in nature\*, which were discovered along with three other codices by Hara Prasād Śāstrī in the Nepal Durbar Library and was subsequently published by him in a single book under the title *Hājār Bacharer Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāy Bauddha Gān O Dohā* 'Buddhist Songs and Couplets in Bengali Language One Thousand Years Old'. The publication of this book (1916) caused a great furore among the linguisticians. The *Dohās* gave sample of a language which partly resembled the last phase of Middle Indo-Aryan (i.e., the state of the spoken languages of North India from circa 600 B.C.—1000 A.D.) and the phase immediately preceding the New Indo-Aryan languages (circa 1000 A.D.). Since at that time Historical Linguistics was primarily preoccupied with the reconstruction of the ultimate source language known as the "Proto-Speech or Ur-Sprache" and in establishing the gradual sequence

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\* These *dohās* were written by Buddhist *siddhācāryas* for the common people. The Brahmins had utter contempt for these yogis which was equally vigorously and heartily reciprocated in the writings of these *dohā*-writers. Here are some examples of their writing.

*vāmaṇēhi na jānanta hi bheu  
evai parihau e ccau veu* // [Saraha]

'The Brahmins do not know (lit. by the Brahmins not knowing) even the distinction, yet they read (lit. by them are read) the four Vedas'.

*kintaha tiṭṭha tapavana jai  
makkha ki labbhai paṇi phāi* // [Saraha]

'What is the use of going (lit. why goes) to the holy places and sacred forests? Can salvation be attained by dipping in water?'

*loaha gavva samuvvahi haṃ paramatthe pavīṇa /  
koḍiha majjhē ekku jai hoi nirañjana-līṇa* // [Kanha]

'Among the people the boast is held high : I am experienced in the supreme goal. But it is a doubtful whether even a single person among ten millions sticks to Niranjana.'

*āgama-vea-purāṇē paṇḍia māna vahanti /  
pakka-siriphale alia jima vāheri bhamanti* // [Kanha]

'In the *āgama*, *Veda* and *Purāṇa* scholars hold (their head) high, (They in fact) like bees move around ripe wood-apples drawn by the smell'.

in the evolution of a particular language the importance of these texts could not be overemphasized. The texts shed fresh and new light in tracing the history and development of the New Indo-Aryan languages.

Unfortunately the manuscript was not a good one. It was felt that before this text can be utilised properly a good edition was a desideratum. With this end in view Shahidullah studied the language of these metrical compositions in comparison with their Tibetan translations. Incidentally the existence of a Tibetan translation of the *dohās* was first brought to the notice of the scholarly world by Suniti Kumar Chatterji. Later Probodh Chandra Bagchi brought out an edition of this translation. Thus Shahidullah succeeded in establishing the 'correct' readings of the poems. In determining the phonological problems he had recourse to metrical analysis of the verses. So Shahidullah analysed the language of the *dohās* from different angles and succeeded in giving a succinct account of a changing phase in the development of the Aryan speech in India. This work brings out the very best of Shahidullah.

Shahidullah's next work in English which in a sense is an extension of his 1928 work is an edition of the *Caryā*-songs—the major codex in the book published by Śāstrī. In his edition Shahidullah suggested many readings which had escaped the notice of the earlier editors of these poems and which have been accepted by many subsequent editors. (The *Caryā*-songs 46 and a half in number offer the earliest specimens of Bengali and Proto-Bengali and have drawn the attention of linguists ever since their discovery.) Shahidullah's edition is certainly an improvement. The major difficulty in the interpretation of this text is that these are written in a code language of a religious sect who claimed that their guru was dumb and the disciples were deaf (*Caryā* 40:8). Under the circumstances can anybody after the lapse of nearly a millenium hope to understand the "real" meaning of the verses?

Most of Shahidullah's books and papers are written in Bengali. In 1935 Shahidullah's Bengali Grammar (*Bāṅgālā Vyākaraṇa*) was

published from Dacca. The grammar is meant for the students from High School or High Madrasa to the Undergraduate level. Shahidullah's grammar is the first Bengali grammar by a trained linguist. Suniti Kumar Chatterji's grammar *Bhāṣa-Prakāś'* *Bāṅgālā Vyākaraṇa* was published four years later. Shahidullah states in his introduction that encouraged by the observations of Rabindranath Tagore, Hara Prasād Śāstrī and Yogesh Chandra Ray Vidyānidhi he embarked on a scheme to write a grammar of the Bengali language taking into account the facts of the *sādhu* (i.e., chaste or Sanskritized) as well as the *calita* (i.e., spoken or colloquial) variety. The second variety, he aptly realized, was steadily gaining ground in creative literature particularly in drama and novel. In the preface Shahidullah also opined that in some distant future Bengali would shake off all its Sanskritic elements and would truly become an independent language but till that time a grammar of Bengali must incorporate a good deal of Sanskrit grammar. That is why Shahidullah strongly advocated for the retention of the dative case in Bengali. (In fact Rabindranath Tagore supported by Sanskrit scholars like Hara Prasād Śāstrī had first suggested that serious efforts must be made to free Bengali from the strait-jacket of Sanskrit grammar.)

Shahidullah's next important book is the history of the Bengali language *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣār Itivṛtta*. In this book Shahidullah put forward his views on the origin of the Bengali language. Shahidullah held that the immediate ancestor of Bengali is not Māgadhī Prākṛt but Gauḍī Prākṛt. One of the fundamental point of linguistic enquiry at that time was to trace back the ultimate source of historical language. (In fact attempts were made even to reconstruct connected passages in the Ur-Sprache. In this direction first attempt was made by August Schleicher.) Needless to say, Shahidullah did not agree with Suniti Kumar Chatterji on many issues reminding one of the Sanskritic adages *nāsau muniryasya matam na bhinnam*. Here it must be stated that some of Shahidullah's alternative suggestions are equally probabilistic. However, what was Chatterji's ultimate reaction to Shahidullah's formulations remains a guesswork.

Shahidullah's History of Bengali Literature (*Bānglā Sāhityer Kathā*) covering the old and the middle periods in the separate volumes appeared in 1953 and 1965 respectively. It gives a readable account of the story of the Bengali literature. However, the book is perhaps far less comprehensive than Sukumar Sen's History of Bengali Literature (*Bānglā Sāhityer Itihās*) in four volumes and five parts (1941-1954).

Shahidullah's edition of Alaol's *Padmāvatī* is a standard one. The edition contains discussion on the source of the poem, Alaol's life and an evaluation of the literary merit of the text.

The next major work of Shahidullah was the compilation of a dialectal dictionary of East Pakistan. It is a monumental work in three volumes published by the Bengali Academy (1965-68). No such large scale dictionary was undertaken earlier. In 1923 the Asiatic Society, Calcutta published 'Vocabulary of Peculiar Vernacular Bengali Words' by F. E. Pargiter. This work does not stand comparison with Shahidullah's dictionary. Shahidullah as the chief editor of this dictionary wrote a longish prefatory note where he revamped his pet 'Gauḍī Prākṛt' theory. This dictionary seeks to justify Max Müller's observation that the real and natural life of languages is in its dialects. It is true that despite its enormous mass some of the common words are missing in the book but that does not detract the merit of the book a whit. (See *infra*.)

Shahidullah was not a grammarian who rejoiced only in the analysis of the internal structure of a language either dead or living. He was equally interested in literature. And here too his taste was as comprehensive and as catholic as one could expect—from the Vedas to Folk Literature. Like young Rabindranath Tagore's professor of English literature he may have believed

"The true love of Literature does not walk only on the mountain tops, it leads us also to the copse and meadow, on the lower slopes, and gives us rest upon the moss beside the small rills of the valley".

Shahidullah's first article in Bengali was published in the literary monthly *Bhārati* to which reference has already been made. Shahidullah though a thorough-bred Sanskritist developed a sim-

ple Bengali prose style. His prose like the man was easy, direct and racy. *L'homme est le style*. In his later life he wrote on many subjects including religion, language, culture and social problems. In his essays he shows rare analytical ability and impersonality. He could judge the issue on its merits.

Shahidullah was also a creative writer. He wrote original short stories. He also translated stories from European languages. He was also, to borrow a term from a well-known poet-critic, 'a competent versifier'. But his original metrical compositions remain scattered in the pages of journals and little magazines.

Shahidullah was a scholar and he would always be remembered as a scholar but his literary attempts add colour to his charming personality.

Shahidullah's last major work undertaken and successfully completed was the three-volume Dialectal Dictionary of East Pakistan (Pūrva Pākistānī Āñcalik Bhāṣār Abhidhān). The Project initiated in 1958 by the Bengali Academy, Dacca had rightly entrusted the entire responsibility to Shahidullah. It was published in three volumes (1965-68). Indeed there was no other man who could do the job better than Shahidullah. In fact no other project of such a dimension has been undertaken after the great linguistic survey conducted and coordinated by George Abraham Grierson. It is interesting to note that the necessity to collect regional vocables for a proper understanding of Bengali was repeatedly stated by Tagore. It was perhaps in fitness of things it became Shahidullah's lot to partly fulfil the poet's dream. Apart from the collection of a large mass of material, the book is characterised by some brilliant etymological speculations which threw new light on the linguistic peculiarities of these dialects.

The importance of the dialects or regional variants of a language has always been acknowledged. In fact in certain matters dialects are more important than the sterilized standard forms. Antoine Meillet, the great French linguist, stated that the real nature of Proto Indo-European could not be understood because of lack of knowledge of Proto Indo-European dialectology. This observation is equally true of the Bengali linguistic situation.

The most interesting part of the entire project was the past etymology. Etymology is perhaps the most difficult and most treacherous area of linguistics. Shahidullah has done a grand job of it. The book despite errors and defects is a great achievement of a great scholar.



## An Excursus

In a brilliant, scintillating and well-documented article *Bāṅgālā O Tāhār Sahodara Bhāṣāy Vartamāna Kāler Uttampuruṣa*. (Present First Person Endings in Bengali and Related Languages) published in the journal of the Bangīya Sāhitya Pariṣat, Shahidullah demolished the theory that Middle Bengali did not indicate number opposition (e.g., Modern English *I speak* vs *we speak* as against French *je parle* vs *nous parlons* or German *ich spreche* vs *wir sprechen*) in First person in the present tense. Culling copious data (151 occurrences with repetition) from Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana, the most important text representing the linguistic features of early Middle Bengali he noticed the following distribution pattern of the so-called number-wise non-distinctive endings.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
- ō (64)	- ie (24)
- o (20)	- i (21)
- a ( 1)	- i (16)
- i ( 1)	- o ( 3)
	- ō ( 1)
total    86	65

These 151 occurrences are all preceded by the pronoun subject. Hence it is quite evident that Middle Bengali did distinguish number distinction in the verbal paradigm. Thus— -ō was the ending of the singular and -i of the plural. (This, however, was a definite improvement on Suniti Kumar Chatterji). Shahidullah furnished further corroborative evidence from the usage noticed in the fringe dialects of Modern Bengali. The dialectal distributions are like this :

- a. Rangpur dialect : mui kārō ‘I do’ : hāmṛā kari ‘we do’
- b. Jalpaiguri dialect : mui kara ‘id’ : āmrā kari ‘we do’
- c. Coochbihar dialect : mui karō ‘id’ : āmrā kari ‘we do’
- d. Goalpara dialect : mui karō ‘id’ : āmrā kari ‘we do’
- e. Sylhet dialect : mui jāō ‘I go’ : āmi jāi ‘we go’.

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## APPENDIX I

### A Calendar of Shahidullah's Life

1885	Born in Peyara village
1904	Entrance Examination (Howrah District School, Howrah)
1906	First Arts Examination (Presidency College, Calcutta)
1910	B. A. Honours in Sanskrit (City College, Calcutta)
1912	M. A. in Comparative Philology (Calcutta University)
1913	B. L. (Calcutta University)
1919-21	Research Assistant (Bengali Department, Calcutta University)
1921-26	Lecturer (Department of Sanskrit and Bengali, Dacca University)
1928	D. Litt. (Sorbonne University, Paris)
1928-44	Reader and Head of the Department of Bengali, Dacca University
1941	Philological President (All India Oriental Conference, Hyderabad)
1948-52	Special Professor, Department of Bengali, Dacca University
1954-57	Professor and Head of the Department of Bengali, Rajshahi University
1959-60	Editor, Urdu Dictionary (Karachi)
1965-68	Editor, Pūrva Pākistānī Āñcalik Bhāsār Abhidhān
1967-69	Emeritus Professor, Dacca University
1969	Died in Dacca.

## APPENDIX II

### Outlines of an Historical Grammar of the Bengali Language

BY

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#### LECTURE I

Introduction : Historical Grammar, its scope, use and method.

Whether in ancient times or modern, whether in Greece or Rome, England or France, national awakening has been co-eval with literary renaissance. It is a happy sign of the times that Bengali, once despised by the learned in the first flush of their western culture, is now being cultivated by men who could have been a glory to any country. Bengali formerly scarcely recognised by our Alma Mater, has now the coveted position of being one of the subjects for the highest degree of the premier University in India. Need I tell through whose exertions? The name and fame of Bengali instead of being confined to a few savants of Europe is now even on the lips of the men in the street, thanks to the genius of another son of Bengal. It is quite in keeping with the spirit of the age that a systematic and scientific study of such a language should engage our first attention.

In a series of lectures I propose to deal with the Historical Grammar of the Bengali Language and this lecture is intended to serve as introductory to those which follow. As this is an

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<sup>1</sup> On the back of the pedestal of the marble bust of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee erected in 1912 by students (of whom this writer was one) are these two lines :

His noblest achievement, surest of all—

The place of his mother-tongue in step-mother's hall.



untrodden field, I am well aware of the difficulties besetting my path and my own short-comings, for which I crave indulgence of my learned critics.

Diversity is as much the creation of nature as uniformity is her law. Since the species 'homo' has been a thinking animal, his mind has been ever busy in finding out uniformity in diversity. It was as much human mind as God that created cosmos out of chaos. In every field of mental activity, religion or superstition, philosophy or science, the main tendency of human mind has been to arrive at the general principle from particular instances, in order to explain the particular by means of the general. Descriptive grammar, which is ordinarily known simply as Grammar, is the outcome of such a tendency of human mind to hit upon a few general laws in a particular language. In spite of the best efforts of the grammarian, there must remain some grammatical facts which refuse to come under general rule and are conveniently labelled as exceptions which he is at a loss to explain.

Comparative Grammar goes still further and tries to find out similarity between a number of languages, descended from a common stock or family, by picking out their general features. Thus as we have grammatical works by numerous authors, of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and other languages belonging to what is called the Indo-Germanic or Indo-European family, we have a Comparative Grammar of Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Gothic, German and Slavonic Languages by Franz Bopp, Compendium of the Comparative Grammar of the Indo-European—Sanskrit, Greek and Latin—Languages by August Schleicher, Elements of the Comparative Grammar of the Indo-Germanic Languages by Karl Brugmann and other Comparative Grammars, of less extensive character, of Indo-European languages.

Historical Grammar on the other hand records the past history of a language by tracing the different stages through which the language has passed. Herakleitus of old said, "Everything changes." This is specially the case with Languages. Indeed "languages are not born but transmuted". Whereas Descriptive Grammar simply deals with the static aspect of a particular language at

a particular period, Historical Grammar is concerned with its dynamic aspect. Like an accurate historian it describes the changes in a language or rather a language-stream through different periods of its existence. It accounts for the Grammatical facts left unexplained by the grammarian by referring to the past history of the language. It also traces the origin of a word to its earliest possible form by supplying the intermediate forms from records or otherwise.

Historical Grammar is also Comparative in as much as it must compare the different stages of a particular language-stream, which stages may themselves be different languages. Comparative Grammar comes to its aid, when in tracing the history of a grammatical form or a word the missing link is to be supplied by comparing other cognate languages. This is also useful in verifying the results of Historical Grammar. An example of this combination of historical and comparative methods will make this clear.

The oldest Indo-Aryan form, as evidenced by Vedic, Classical Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākṛit, for the first person singular of the personal pronoun is अहम् *ahám* with the accent on the second syllable, whereas it is আমি *āmi* in Bengali. By no known phonetic law we can connect আমি *āmi* with अहम् *ahám*, for we know that the final *m* of Vedic, Classical Sanskrit, Pāli or Prākṛit does not survive in the Apabhraṃśas, from which Bengali and other modern Indo-Aryan vernaculars are descended, but is elided, sometimes nasalising the preceding vowel and sometimes without leaving any trace. Moreover *h* being accented cannot be elided in Apabhraṃśa. Now let us take the help of the Historical Grammar of the Bengali language. From old records we find the earlier forms of আমি *āmi* are আমি *āhmi* (Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan, 14th Cen.; Śūnya Purāṇ, 16th Cen.; Gorakṣa Vijay, 18th Cen.<sup>1</sup>), আন্হে *āhme* (Kṛṣṇa-Kīrtan, Bauddha-Gān-O-Dohā, 12th Cen.), অন্হে *ahme*, অন্হে *amhe*, অন্হে *ambhe* (Bauddha-Gān). These lead us to the Apabhraṃśa, Prākṛit and Pāli form अम्हे *amhe* 'we', which points to the old Indo-Aryan form अस्मे

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<sup>1</sup> These are the probable dates of the Mss., the originals are very likely much earlier

*asmé*. In the Veda *asmé* has been found to be used in the dative and locative plural. We can trace the history of *asmé* still further plural. Thus the Lesbian Greek 'amme' *amme*, 'we' points to a Primitive Indo-European base *asma* to which *e* was added in Indo-Aryan in analogy with pronominal plurals with *e* like सबै *sarve*, ये *ye*, ते *te*, &c. Thus we find আমি *ami* is derived not from *aham* but from *asmé*, which is a plural form. How wonderful it is that with the help of Historical Grammar we are transported from the modern times to the old Vedic age and thence to the dim past when the Greeks and the Hindus lived together and spoke cognate dialects!

We may compare আমি *ami* with other modern Indo-Aryan vernacular forms. Thus Oriya *āmhe*, Marathi *āmhi*, Gipsy *amēn*, Gujrati *ame*, Marwari *mhe*, Nepali *hāmī*, Northern Bengali *hāmī* (with unoriginal *h*), Hindi *ham* (\**hame* \**mhe*), Panjabi and Sindhi *asī*, Kashmiri *asi*, Sinhalese *api*. All these forms ultimately point to *asmé* as their original and can be phonetically derived from it. All these with the exception of Northern Bengali *hāmī* are plural forms meaning *we*, from this we conjecture that *āmi* was originally plural. This guess is proved to be correct by comparing it with Assamese *āmi*, 'we' (*mai* 'I'), Chakma *āmi*, 'we' (*mui* 'I'), Mayang *āmi*, 'we' (*mi* 'I'). I may mention here that Chakma being ensconced in the hill tracts of Chittagong and Mayang insulated all around by Tibeto-Burmans in Manipore are two dialects of Bengali, which have preserved many traits of old Bengali. Thus 'to history, regarded as an instrument of philology, comparison must be added as a precious ally. By comparison theories are proved, hypotheses verified.' (Brachet).

Historical Grammar is as much dependent on Comparative Grammar as the latter is on the former. In order that comparison may be successful we must take the earliest form, which is the function of Historical Grammar. No one can suspect any connection between Bengali honorific second and third person, singular and plural করেন *karen* with Oriya third person plural *karanti*; but the connection becomes evident when it is found from records that the old Bengali forms were *karanti*, *karenti*, *karenta* (Śunya Purāṇ,

Gorakṣavijay; &c.), so that the Bengali honorific 2nd and 3rd person singular (and plural) ending *en* is really the original 3rd person plural form equivalent to Vedic, Classical Sanskrit, Pāli, Prākṛit, and Apabhraṃśa *anti*. This is corroborated by the Chakma dialect and the Eastern Sylhet and Cachar dialect of Bengali in which the third person honorific form is the same as the third person plural form and has the characteristic personal ending *n*. Thus Sylhetia *tārā*, *tāin*, or *āpne jāin* and in Chakma *tāhārā jāy*, তিনি or আপনি যান *tini* or *āpani jān*, of modern standard Bengali. In Chakma *tumi* is used in place of standard Bengali both তোমরা *tomarā*, আপনি *āpani*.

Like the stream, language is ever in a state of change. With every generation and in every country, nay with every individual and in every village, there is change in a particular language, however slight or slow the change may be. As in all other natural phenomena, there is a law of change in all linguistic phenomena. To be ignorant of the law is to be puzzled and bewildered with the apparently unconnected facts and to know the law is to grasp and follow the facts easily and intelligently, like one who knows the plot of a big novel as opposed to him who is ignorant of it. Now to discover the law, it is necessary to observe the series of changes and to compare them with other known series. But linguistic phenomena are not at the beck and call of any one, so that they may be repeated at will like chemical phenomena. So observation in order to be varied and hence fruitful, must needs take cognizance of the past history of the language. Here comes the use of Historical Grammar.

As we cannot understand a fact without knowing what fact preceded and conditioned it, so we cannot understand grammar without the help of Historical Grammar. A character in a popular Bengali drama very pertinently asks "If *he*, *his*, *him*, in the case of males, why not *she*, *shis*, *shim* in the case of females?" Only Historical Grammar can answer such queries. As only history can explain how it is that a particular country is divided into so many districts or shires of irregular shape and dissimilar area rather than of equal square areas, so Historical Grammar alone is in a position

to explain how it is that we have a particular grammatical form or word. In short the whole function of the Historical Grammar of a language lies in answering the question "Why do we speak as we do?" (Whitney). A few examples will put this in clearer light.

In modern Bengali, to an inferior or to a very intimate we put the question তুই কি করিস, *tui ki karis?* to an equal তুমি কি কর *tumi ki kara?* and to a superior আপনি কি করেন *āpani ki karen?* Fortunately the plural forms are not different from the singular. A language which has three forms for the second person may well seem to its speakers very courtly, but to a foreigner most perplexing indeed.

In tracing the history of তুই *tui* we find its earlier forms to have been তো *toe*, তোঁ *tōe* (Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan), তুঁ *tāi* (Bauddha Gān), Apabhraṁśa तई *taī*, Prākṛit *taī*, Pali *tayā* which lead to the Vedic and Classical Sanskrit form त्वया *tvayā*, the agent form in the *Karmaṇi Vācya*. The Apabhraṁśa *taī* is also the nominative form. करिस *karis* in old records is करसि *karasi* (Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan, Śūnya Purān, etc.) This is also the Apabhraṁśa and Prākṛit form. This leads to the Pāli *karosi*, Classical Sanskrit करोषि.

তুমি *tumi* in old records is *tumhi*, *tohme*, *tuhme*, *tumhe* (Bauddha Gān, Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan, etc.). This latter form is also the Apabhraṁśa, Prākṛit and Pāli 2nd person plural form. This helps us to reconstruct the old Indo-Aryan form *tuṣme* 2nd person plural built on the analogy of Vedic *yuṣme* and also used in the plural. कर *kara* in the old Mss. (18th Century and upwards) is करह *karaha*, which is also the Apabhraṁśa and Prākṛit form; this leads us to the Pāli form *karoṭha*, equivalent to the Classical Sanskrit *kurutha*, the second person plural form of the present indefinite.

Tracing upwards we find the earlier forms of আপনি *āpani* were आपणे *āpaṇe* (Bauddha Gān) आपण *āpaṇe* (Apabhraṁśa), अपणा *appaṇā* (Prākṛit). From *appaṇā* we pass to the Vedic and Classical Sanskrit *ātmanā* the agent form in the *Karmaṇi Vācya*. That Sanskrit *tm*=Prākṛit *pp* through an intermediate *tp* is established by phonology. We have shown before that করেন *karen* is descended from *karanti*, which leads to Pāli *karonti*, equivalent to Sanskrit

कुर्वन्ति *kurbanti*. As for the use of a singular nominative in the third person with a verb in the plural to denote honour (*gaurave vahu-vacanāṁ*) we find in Baudha-Gān such uses as ভগন্তি বিরুআ (p. 7), *Birupa* says, কহন্তি গুরু পরমার্থের বাট (p. 38), *Guru speaks of the way of slavation*, and in Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan বিনয় করিআঁ পুছন্তি দেবরাজে (p. 10), *the Lord of the Devas asks with humility*, হেন বিপরীত কথা কহন্তি কাহাজিঁ (p. 87) *Kānhāi speaks such unjust words*.

Thus from Historical Grammar, we infer that তুই করিস *tui karis* was originally the singular and তুমি কর *tumi kara*, the plural, of the second person, and আপনি করেন *āpani karen*, the plural form of the third person.

If an additional corroboration is necessary some of the dialects of Bengali supply it. Thus Mayang *ti osōt* = Bengali তুই আছিস *tui āchis*, তুমি আছ *tumi ācha*, Mayang *tumi osō* = Bengali তোমরা আছ *tomarā ācha*; Chakma *tui māras* = Bengali তুই মারিস *tui māris*, তুমি মার *tumi māra*; Chakma *tumi māra*=Bengali তোমরা মার *tomarā māra*. In Sylhetia the same personal ending of the verb is used for তারা *tārā* and আপনি *āpani*, as I have shown before.

Historical Grammar places etymology on the sure basis of facts gleaned from actual records or inferred from unassailable phonetic laws, where old-fashioned philologists of the school of Horne Tooke and Ménage were content with the fantastic play of imagination in connecting two words generally of the same meaning but of totally different forms. This drew on philology the well-known satire of Voltaire who defined it as a science in which the vowels count for nothing and the consonants for very little. Brachet quotes an example from Ménage. "Thus Ménage derived the word *rat* from Latin *mus* : 'they doubtless first said *mus*, then *murtus*, then *ratus* and lastly *rat*!'" The spirit of Ménage is not dead even in the twentieth century, when we find a grave gentleman puts forward the derivation of Eng. *water* from Skt. *pāthas*, thus *pāthas*, *pāthār*, *bāthā*, *water* ! And another undaunted pseudo-philologist seriously derives Arabic *kitāb* from Skt. *pustaka* by reading it from right to left as, *kastuk* and then *kattub* and finally *kitāb* ! Historical Grammar had nothing to do with such imaginary intermediate forms. It

demands strict historical proof of their existence. Even where it supplies an hypothetical form, it must justify every letter, vowel and consonant, of the hypothetical form in the light of the phonology and the history of the language. For example, it will not do to say that *r* the genitive suffix of Bengali is derived from *sya* or *visarya* of the sixth case ending of Skt. in such forms as *devasya*, *vidheh*, *vāriṇah*, &c. It must be shown by unmistakable examples that in the intermediate stages from the old Indo-Aryan to modern Bengali through Vedic, *Pāli*, *Prākṛit*, *Apbhraṃśa* and old Bengali this *s* or *visarga* was not elided but regularly changed to *r*. A superficial philologist will connect Skt. *mallikā* with Bengali *bel* (the *bela* flower); but a sound philologist without coming to any conclusion *a priori* will hunt for the earlier forms of *bel*. He will find it *veilla* (Hemacandra) which easily leads to late Skt. *vicakila*. He will go no further.

I may quote another example. Every reader of Bankim Candra remembers the song *Girijāyā*—সাধের তরলী আমার কে দিল তরঙ্গে। কে আছে কাণ্ডারী হেন কে যাইবে সঙ্গে। (*Mṛṇālīnī*). In two of the best dictionaries of Bengali কাণ্ডারী *kāṇḍārī* has been derived as কাণ্ডার+ঈ and কাণ্ডার from Skt. काण्ड. Kavikaṅkan (16th Century) uses কাণ্ডার in the sense of কাণ্ডারী. Thus কাণ্ডারের বচন করিয়া অবগতি। ত্রিবেণীতে স্নান করে সাধু ধনপতি। *Śunya Purāṇ* has also কাণ্ডার; thus রজতের লৌকা হইল সুবর্ণ কেরুয়াল। আপুনি ত ধর্মরাজ হৈল কাণ্ডার। In *Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* it is কাণ্ডার. Thus মনগমনে চলে না খানী তোমার। আপণে কাহাঞি তাত ভৈল কাণ্ডার। In *Bauddha Gān* it is কন্ডহার. Thus চিত কন্ডহার সৃণত মাঙ্গে। চলিল কাহ্ন মহাসূহ সাঙ্গে। From these we can easily connect কাণ্ডার *kāṇḍār* with Skt. कर्णधार *karnadhāra* through the intermediate forms কাণ্ডার *kāṇḍhār*, কন্ডহার *kaṇḍahāra*, and কাণ্ডারী *kāṇḍārī* with Skt. कर्णधारী *karnadhārī*.

The preceding examples lead us to consider the method to be followed in Historical Grammar. Though Historical Grammar is generally compared with the Political History of a country, the method followed by Historical Grammar must be different from that followed by the Political History owing to the different nature of the subject-matter of each. Political History strictly follows the sequence of time beginning with the remotest known period of the country, whereas Historical Grammar begins with the present form

of a language and traces its history backwards till it reaches the earliest possible stage which would satisfactorily explain all the subsequent stages of the language. This is known as the Historical method.

This method depends on the past records of a language. Where the records are wanting, we should take the help of Comparative Grammar and Phonology and reconstruct the missing links. The hypothetical forms thus reconstructed differ from the fanciful forms of the unscientific etymology-hunters in important points. Firstly, every letter of the form to be explained must be satisfactorily accounted for by the hypothetical form (which is supposed to precede it). Secondly, if the change of a letter is assumed in any word, it must be shown by at least one other convincing example of a similar change is allowed by the language. Thus, *water* cannot be derived from Skt. *pāthas*, *bāthār*, because there is no instance of the initial *p* in Skt. being ever changed to *b* or *w* in English, whereas the uniform rule is the change of the initial Sanskrit or Classical *p* to English *f* : cf. Skt. *pitar*, Eng. Father; Skt. *pāda*, Eng. foot, etc.

In the foregoing I have indicated the line which I intend to follow in dealing with my subject. In conclusion I cannot help quoting the following observations made by the late Professor Max Müller in the preface to the 6th volume of his first edition of the *Rig-Veda* (p. 53) : "With scholars and with all true men of science, who care for truth, the question is never who is right and who is wrong, but what is right and what is wrong. The life of a scholar would not be worth living if, in return for many things which he has to surrender, he did not secure for himself that one inestimable privilege of owing allegiance to no person, to no party, to no school or clique, but being able at all times to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth, about all things which concern him, convinced that all who deserve the name of scholars will thank him where he has pointed out any of their mistakes, will forgive him even where he may have spoken rather freely or bluntly, and will defend him against the clamour of those who seem to think they are nothing unless they are infallible."